

## Darius Crossing the Sea: The Achaemenid Factor in the Bosporan Kingdom

Gocha **TSETSKHLADZE** (Oxford)

*Professor, Linacre College, Oxford; University of Nottingham; International Hellenic University, Thessaloniki; University of Bucharest, g.tsetskhladze63@gmail.com*

**T**he Achaemenid factor in the western, eastern and southern Black Sea has received much attention. The situation in the northern Black Sea, especially the Cimmerian Bosporus, is more complex, not least because the vast majority of academics still want to connect everything that happened here with the Scythians. Achaemenid objects, long known or recently discovered, are seen as evidence of trading relationships. This is taking the easy option. A different approach and a different reading of the evidence present a very different picture, even without mentioning recent discoveries.

To start with the creation of the Bosporan kingdom: the long-accepted account is based on very confusing information given by Diodorus (12.31.1). Namely, that it was created around 480 BC primarily to withstand Scythian expansion. At least now, more and more accept that this date is not that of the creation of this kingdom. Rather, it began when the Spartocid dynasty came to power in Panticapaeum in 438/7 BC and the territorial consolidation was completed only in the late 4<sup>th</sup> century. What Diodorus wrote about the Archaeanaetids and their assumption of power in Panticapaeum simply concerns Panticapaeum itself and possibly a few other Greek cities nearby in the eastern Crimea. A local event.

Excavations of the last two decades demonstrated two points quite clearly, both in need of explanation from an historical perspective. First, there are traces of localised fire and destruction in some of the Greek cities and settlements of the Cimmerian Bosporus. We even know now that the first fortification walls in Myrmekion and Porthmeus were built at some time after the middle of the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC. Destruction and fire are also recorded in the Greek cities and settlements of the Cimmerian Bosporus at the end of the 6<sup>th</sup>-beginning of the 5<sup>th</sup> century BC, most dramatically in Panticapaeum. Both waves of destruction and also the appearance of the first city walls have been linked to the Scythians. The second destruction is considered as clear evidence of the Scythian aggression that led to the creation of the Bosporan kingdom in 480 BC.

I shall not present here a full list of the weaknesses in this interpretation. I and a few others have done so recently in print. Instead, I shall just mention the main ones and the alternative interpretations. The first is that it is surprising and revealing how all of this destruction can be blamed on

the Scythians when there is no evidence to show that there were any Scythians around at the time. Let us pay attention to written sources. Could the destruction instead be linked to the coming of the Achaemenids? I find the information of Ctesias most revealing. Unfortunately, he is used less widely than Herodotus. In one place, Ctesias (*History of Persia* F13.20) writes that Darius ordered Ariaramnes, the satrap of Cappadocia, to cross over to Scythia and to take some men and women as prisoners of war. He adds that Ariaramnes crossed the sea and indeed did this. The only way to reach Scythia by sea was to sail through the Cimmerian Bosphorus. The suggested date of this expedition is about 519 BC. Many scholars accept this expedition as a preparation for Darius' Scythian campaign of about 513 BC. It would be much more reasonable to suggest that the first destruction should be connected to Ariaramnes' expedition. It is also reasonable to propose that this is the point at which the Cimmerian Bosphorus was included in the Achaemenid empire. Elsewhere, Ctesias (*History of Persia* F1b.2.1–3) states that the Great King's aim was to conquer the whole of Asia between the Tanais and the Nile, and that he spent 17 years doing so. Ctesias also gives a very long list of the territories and peoples brought under Persian control, at the end of which he includes the barbarian tribes that lived on the Black Sea coast as far as the River Tanais. It would be no surprise if some Greek cities resisted these developments and were taken by force.

If we turn to Herodotus (4.120–122) and his account of Darius' Scythian campaign, he states directly that the Persian army pursued the Scythians all along the coast of Lake Maeotis and even across the River Tanais. Thus, we have very good grounds for concluding that the Cimmerian Bosphorus was part of the Achaemenid empire, even before Darius' Scythian campaign.

What about the destruction of the end of the 6<sup>th</sup>/beginning of the 5th century BC? Could there be some Achaemenid link here too? It is reasonable to suggest that the Persians, in the course of the Graeco-Persian wars, wished to destroy Milesian maritime connections. With the Ionian revolt, Persian support for the Black Sea Ionian cities ended. It has even been suggested that a fleet sailing from Sinope or Heracleia Pontica destroyed the Ionian network, including those elements of it in the northern Black Sea. An alternative view is that the Achaemenids withdrew temporarily from this area in the wake of the Graeco-Persian wars and that the Archæanactid tyranny stepped in to fill the power vacuum that resulted. These are all events which could have led to destruction in and of some of the cities of the Cimmerian Bosphorus.

Is there any evidence, even indirect, to suggest that the Bosporan kingdom was incorporated in the Achaemenid empire? Yes, there is. Panticapæum adopted the Persian coin standard after the early Classical peri-

od, and types bearing an eight-pointed star are deemed to reflect an Achaemenid political orientation. The titulature on official inscriptions of the Spartocids rulers of the Bosporan kingdom also betrays Achaemenid influence. Symbols in the grave of Bosporan king Satyrus I (d. 389/8 BC) in the Baksinsk tomb are Achaemenid. Parallels have been drawn between the Bosporan king's gift of Kepoi to Gylon as a reward for his betraying Nymphaeum (Aeschines 3.171–172), with the reward to Themistocles for entering Persian service, to conclude that the practice betokened Achaemenid rule over the Cimmerian Bosporus. Quite a number of personal names from the northern Black Sea are of Persian origin, with Darius found in Panticapaeum.

The Achaemenid presence leaves but a shallow archaeological footprint in consequence of the successful creation of Achaemenid court art and culture, which adapted those of subject regions and peoples to create something distinctive that was superimposed on the original culture of the Persians themselves. 'Persianisation' is hard to identify, the deliberate official policy being to leave the cultural identity of subject peoples intact and to maintain their ethnic identity. Objects found are mainly gold, silver, jewels and arms, often hard to date or to source. All can be labelled 'Achaemenid international style', but more precise identification is problematic.

Several North Pontic finds of metal objects of the 5th–4th centuries BC can be described as Achaemenid or Achaemenid-inspired: the handle of the Chertomlyk sword; a rhyton from the Seven Brothers tomb 4, produced in Asia Minor *ca.* 450–425 BC, bowls from the Solokha, Zhirni and Zelenskoi tombs, and a rhyton from Kul-Oba (imitation Achaemenid). Seven Brothers was the burial place of the Sindian kings, whose territory had been incorporated in the Bosporan kingdom; the rhyton was probably a diplomatic gift, attesting to direct links with the Achaemenid empire. The Maeotians had also been absorbed into the kingdom. The Ulyap tumuli yielded Achaemenid and Achaemenid-inspired items of the first half of the 4th century BC, and the Ulski tumuli similar objects from the second half of the 6th century (suggesting that the workshops producing items for the Maeotian elite during the period of Achaemenid expansion were Near Eastern or Transcaucasian). There are Near Eastern finds of the Archaic period from Kelermes and other tombs in the Kuban, also fragments of late 7th–/early 6th-century silver rhytons from Scythian tombs in the Don area and in the Ukrainian forest steppe.

A remarkable discovery is that of 19 Achaemenid seals of the 5th–4th centuries BC found in the northern Pontus, especially in the Cimmerian Bosporus: Panticapaeum, the Bosporan capital (six), Anapa, Nymphaeum, Phanagoria, elsewhere including Chersonesus, and four allegedly in Kerch.

Some are fine examples in Achaemenid court style; one carries the name of King Artaxerxes, and another a Lydian inscription. Most were cut in Anatolia, and their iconography is typically Achaemenid. They are clear indication of the presence of officials and ambassadors, thus of an Achaemenid presence. Recently, an Achaemenid coin was found near another Bosphoran city, Kytæum.

Persian royal inscriptions frequently mention Saca(e) — on the Bisitun inscription (DB), as a country and as a people ('who wear pointed hats'); on DPh, DH Saca who are beyond Sogdiana; DPe as a country; and DSe, DNa, XPh, etc., Saca who drink *hauma*, with pointed hats and across/beyond the sea (coming after the Ionians). DSaa mentions Cimmeria, the Babylonian term for the Scythians. DSab very interestingly mentions Saca of marsh and of plain, the same groups as on the Tell el-Maskhoutha canal stela. Much has been written about the identity and categories of Saca. The word is accepted as a synonym for the Scythians thanks to Herodotus (7.64), writing about peoples participating in Xerxes' expedition against Athens in 480 BC: those with pointed caps and native bows, daggers and axes were 'Amyr-gian Scythians but were called Sacae, for the Persians call all Scythians Sacae...' He also noted that some believe that the Massagetae were a Scythian people living beyond the Araxes (Herodotus 1.201). Sacae are also mentioned as fighting at Marathon (Herodotus 6.113) and Plataea (Herodotus 9.31, 71), and participating in a royal pageant of Cyrus II (Xenophon Cyr. 8.3.9–19).

Saca/Scythians is also employed in Achaemenid royal inscriptions generically for nomads living along the northern borders of the empire. The *hauma*-drinkers and the wearers of pointed hats, based on their position in the inscriptions, have been identified as Saca/Scythians dwelling in broadly defined Central Asia, reflected in archaeological evidence; the Saca of marsh and of plain as all the Scythians of the empire's northern periphery, not two distinct groups.

Cyrus incorporated the Saca between the Caspian and Aral Seas in 550–530 BC, who were also mentioned by Herodotus (3.90–94) in his list of satrapies — but he lists several peoples and countries not listed in Achaemenid royal inscriptions, and *vice versa*. Further to the north, tombs of the local nomadic elite of the South Urals have yielded 80 Achaemenid(-style) objects of the end of the 6th–3rd centuries BC (jewels, arms, silver, silver-gilt and gold vessels, etc.), several possibly diplomatic gifts. An inscribed alabastron contains the name of Artaxerxes I. Explaining how they got here is difficult, though they clearly demonstrate a long-term relationship, plausibly based on Achaemenid interest in the region's gold resources.

Some Achaemenid objects were found in the Pazyryk tumuli in the Altai. A hand-knotted carpet from the fifth tumulus, very probably pro-

duced in a Bactrian-Sogdian workshop and influenced by Achaemenid artistic practice, has been interpreted as a gift from the Achaemenid king to the local chieftain.

It is doubtful that the 'Saca/Scythians beyond the Sea' were Getae. Scythians in Dacia were few; and the few objects found there are now linked to the Scytho-Persian wars of the end of the 6th century BC. Although Darius' Scythian campaign was unsuccessful, his deep penetration of Scythian territory in pursuit of ever retreating adversaries justified his including North Pontic Scythians in the list of subject peoples as 'Scythians across the Sea'.

Varied interpretations have been essayed of the delegations on the Apadana relief: the Scythians (Delegation XIX), Saca of other sorts (XI and XVII). Surely we can conclude that the Scythians of the northern Black Sea were under Achaemenid overlordship. The painted battle scene on the Munich Wood invites consideration of the iconography of the Saca/Scythians. It seems likely to show the Great King's enemies, depicted as undifferentiated nomads — intended to be understood as the nomads of the North (Saca/Scythians, etc.) — whom, naturally, he must vanquish as an essential aspect of the propaganda of the royal image.

Evidence of Scythians in prominent positions comes from the Persepolis tablets: Shakka ('the Scythian'), working under Baradkama, Treasurer at Persepolis 490–480/79 BC, perhaps as his deputy (Elamite Treasury tablet PT1); PF 1790 names Shaddukka the Zappiyan, possibly 'a hypocoristic of «the Scythian (girl)»'. Were these by origin Scythians from the North Pontic steppes or just generic Saca (nomads)?

Thucydides (2.97) states unequivocally that the Odrysian kingdom was organised along the same lines as the Achaemenid state. There are parallels in the relationship between the Scythians and the Greek cities of the northern Black Sea, with the former, increasingly eschewing nomadism from the late 5th century BC onwards, demanding taxes/tribute from the Greek cities. And payment, as in the Achaemenid empire, was not just in money or precious metal objects but with the skilled labour of Greek craftsmen, used by the Scythians to create their local elite culture. An electrum vessel from the Kul-Oba tomb, depicting a Scythian soldier binding the wounds of his compatriot, has echoes in Herodotus (7.181), who writes of Persians treating binding wounds with strips of the finest linen.

DPe, paragraph 2, mentions the 'Yauna/Ionians beyond the sea'. Although some reject the idea that these were Greeks living in the northern Black Sea region, we must consider seriously that the Bosporan kingdom and the Greeks living there were indeed under the sway of the Great King, one way or another.

What I outlines above about the Achaemenid factor in the Cimmerian Bosphorus cannot be dismissed as speculation. It must be accepted. Now we

have the unique discovery of an Old Persian inscription from Phanagoria, capital of the Asiatic Bosphorus. It is very fragmentary, but it definitely mentions Darius, which is not surprising as all Old Persian inscriptions were created on his behalf and mention him in their first line. This inscription, which still awaits detailed study, undoubtedly proves that Phanagoria and the whole Black Sea were included in the Achaemenid empire.

To sum up, the Black Sea, as an area with a multi-ethnic population, offers a very good example for the Archaic and Classical periods of how different peoples, be they local or incomer, sought from the outset an accommodation, developing different models of political, social and cultural relationships. For many years the main focus of research for the northern Black Sea has been on the local population and the Greeks. Now it is time to turn our attention to studying the Achaemenid factor.

